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DOCUMENTS

Diary of Thomas Ewing, August and September, 1841

AFTER the dramatic breach between President Tyler and his Cabinet in September, 1841, its members justified themselves by public letters. That of Thomas Ewing, secretary of the treasury, first printed in the *National Intelligencer*, is now most easily found in *Niles' Register*, LXI. 33-34. It appears that it did not rest on memory alone, but that Secretary Ewing, as soon as he scented danger to the relations between President Tyler and the executive advisers inherited from Harrison, in the course which the President was pursuing in regard to the bank act, began to keep a diary of the transactions relative to that and other measures. The manuscript of this diary now belongs to his grandson, Mr. Thomas Ewing of New York City, but a copy of it is possessed by the library of Ohio University at Marietta. To Mr. Ewing and to Mr. C. L. Martzoff of that university we are indebted for the opportunity to print this valuable record, which, as will be seen, contains much information that is not to be found in the letter in Niles.

Not all parts of the manuscript printed below are of the same date. The first three paragraphs were prefixed to the diary proper. The grandson of Secretary Ewing states however that, judging from the handwriting, they are of about the same date. The next three paragraphs are in his handwriting of much later date. The essential portion, beginning with the words "On the morning of the 16th August", are plainly contemporary. The last paragraph under September 1 is shown by the handwriting to be a later insertion. Such is also the character of the final three paragraphs.

A full discussion of the whole crisis from the point of view of the President may be found in Dr. Lyon G. Tyler's *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 39-123.

Thomas Ewing (1789-1871) was graduated from the Ohio University in 1815, practised law for several years at Lancaster, Ohio, was a Whig senator from that state 1831-1837, secretary of the treasury March 5-September 13, 1841, secretary of the interior 1849-1850, senator again 1850-1851, and in 1861 a delegate to the Peace Conference, of which Ex-President Tyler was president.

As soon as the election of Genl. Harrison to the Presidency was informally known to him, he addressed me a letter inviting me to take a place in his Cabinet and signifying that the situation of P. M. G. was the one he proposed to offer me.

I had been long aware that public opinion had designated me for this, or some other place in the Cabinet, and though Genl. Harrison had never in the most remote manner hinted at such a thing I had no doubt that it was his purpose to make me the offer. My mind being made up on the subject I accepted, with all due acknowledgments for the honor proposed to be conferred and the frank and generous promptness with which it had been offered me. I communicated this for the present to no one but my wife and my eldest son in whose secrecy I had full confidence, as I deemed it by no means proper that the fact should first transpire through me. In the same letter Genl. Harrison named Mr. Webster as his proposed Secretary of State and public opinion had definitively settled on Mr. Crittenden as Attorney General. Mr. Bell had been much spoken of for the War Department and several other gentlemen were named for other Departments but no one distinctly pointed to by general public opinion.

The Legislature of Ohio met in Columbus on the first Monday in December. The Court in Bank sat at the same time and the Circuit Court shortly after. I was engaged as counsel in many important cases in these courts and necessarily spent several weeks in that city about their trial. Having disposed of them and arranged my private business as well as I was able in so short a time, I set out for Washington and arrived in the City early in February. By this time it was pretty well understood that I was to be a member of the Cabinet, but it was by no means so well settled what particular post I was to fill. The impression became strong and was constantly gathering strength that I should be placed at the head of the Treasury. But in the midst of this uncertainty I was overwhelmed with applications for office in both Departments especially in the Genl. Post Office which had by far the largest share of patronage. For so completely had it become a settled political axiom within the last twelve years, "to the victors belong the spoils", that all men of both parties seemed to suppose that there would be an immediate and universal sweep of all the officers then in place. There was also another reason and a more just one for this opinion of the public and I may say *mandate* of the popular will. It had been the policy of the party just thrust from power, to retain in office none but their *active* political adherents, those who would go for them thorough in all things; and the performance of official duty, was far less requisite to a tenure of office, than electioneering services. Hence the offices had become for the most part filled with brawling offensive political partisans, of a very low moral standard—their official duties performed by substitutes, or not performed at all. Many defalcations and gross speculation constantly occurring among them, it was thought wise and prudent to make many changes and by so doing, to elevate, as far as possible, the official standard and ensure a more faithful execution of official duties.

General Harrison consulted much with Mr. Webster and myself before announcing his Cabinet. Mr. Webster was made Secretary of State, Ewing Secretary of the Treasury, Bell Secretary of War, Badger

of the Navy, Frank Granger Post Master General and John J. Crittenden Attorney General. There was perfect harmony and good feeling of the members of the Cabinet, with each other, and between them and the leading members of the Whig party generally—but the quiet of the Administration and of the country was greatly disturbed by the sudden death of General Harrison.

Immediately on his demise Mr. Webster dispatched a special messenger to John Tyler the Vice President with the intelligence who in a few days came to Washington and was inaugurated as President. The Cabinet convened to receive him, and he very promptly and courteously requested us all to continue in our then present position as his Council.

An extra session of Congress had been called which met in May. One of their first acts, under the lead of Mr. Clay, was to pass an act to recharter the Bank of the United States, and restore to it the public deposits and fiscal agency, and therein was for the first time disclosed a serious difference between the President and the party who had elected him, including nearly all the members of his Cabinet. The Bank bill was passed early in August, and the President against the advice of his Cabinet determined to veto it. I saw clearly that the Administration was approaching a catastrophe, and on the 16th commenced and kept a diary for the month preceding its dissolution. I give it in full as it was then written.

On the morning of the 16th August I called to see the President and found him putting together the Veto Message on the Bank Bill, in order to send it to the Senate. We had some conversation on the subject, and he read to me certain parts of the message, especially that which contained his strictures on the 16th fundamental article. While thus engaged Mr. Bell, Secretary of War, came in and joined us in the conversation. It was observed by Mr. Bell, that although the Veto would create a great sensation in Congress yet he thought the minds of our friends much better prepared for it than they were some days ago, and he hoped it would be calmly received, especially as it did not shut out the hope of some Bank. The President replied yes, he thought so—his mind had been made up from the first, and he had delayed his message until now that theirs might become quieted—that really they ought to make no difficulty about it, he had sufficiently indicated in his message what kind of Bank he would approve and they might if they saw fit, pass such a one (which would be more acceptable to the country than this) in three days.

The next day (17th) I called and found the President in conversation with Mr. Sergeant of the House and Mr. Berrien of the Senate.¹ I was about to retire but he invited me to sit, observing that the conversation was one to which I should be a party. Those gentlemen had come informally from the Whigs of the two Houses to confer with the President on the subject of a Bank or Fiscal Agent such as might be acceptable to him, and meet the wishes and wants of the Treasury and the country—much was said upon the subject. Mr. Sergeant stated his understanding of that part of the message which recommends agencies, with power to deal in Exchange etc. and wished to have a clear avowal from the President on that subject. The President in reply said that he considered the message sufficiently explicit on that point. That he

¹ John Sergeant of Pennsylvania and Senator John M. Berrien of Georgia.

did not think it became him to draw out a plan of a bank, but he thought it easy to ascertain from the general course of his argument what he would approve. In the course of the conversation I observed that I understood the President to have no objection to a Bank located in the District of Columbia, employing agents in the several States, to perform the services required of it by the Government as a fiscal agent, and incidental to those duties to deal in exchange, and do all other acts which the Bank proposed in the Bill which he had rejected might do except the making of local discounts. To this the President did not object. After continuing the conversation a short time, Messrs. Berrien and Sergeant left us, and I after transacting some official business also departed. The President spoke with some feeling and in a very proper manner of the mob that came the preceding night on his porch to insult him.

On Wednesday the 18th, which was the usual day for the meeting of the Cabinet, I went to the President's, and Messrs. Berrien and Sergeant were with him. He did not by either word or manner invite me to join them so I retired into an adjoining room where I was soon joined by Messrs. Webster and Bell. We remained some time, and Mr. Webster saying he had business retired and requested the servant to say to the President that he would come at his summons—after some time he was sent for and returned—but the door of the audience room was still closed and we waited more than an hour before it was opened and we were in the meantime joined by Mr. Badger. At length the President made his appearance—said he had been conversing with gentlemen who professed to come informally as a committee of the Whigs of the two Houses to get his views on the subject of the Bank—that he had doubts of the propriety of conferring with them and that he had stated those doubts to them—said that he had his constitutional advisers about him with whom and with whom only he thought he ought to consult and that having conferred with them his opinions could be made known to gentlemen on the part of the two houses so far as it was proper to communicate it. Having so said he began by asking us whether his views in that respect were correct. Mr. Webster replied that they were the same expressed by Mr. Madison on some occasion (what I do not remember) when he was consulted in like manner. His explanation drew from me the remark that the two cases probably differed in this—that appeared to have been a *committee* of one or both of the Houses *proper*; *this* an informal unofficial deputation of political friends who came to consult with the President informally, to ascertain his opinions that they might if consistent with their own views of the public good, conform to them. But even in that case I saw no impropriety, on the contrary much prudence in the President's proposed course. of consulting with his Cabinet before he committed himself, even informally, to any one. Mr. Webster said the case he referred to was in all these particulars similar to the present and that he thought the President's proposition, to confer with them only through his Cabinet, quite right. To this no one objected except Mr. Badger who saw no objection to this unofficial friendly intercourse between the President and members of the two Houses, for the purpose of exchanging views and endeavoring to come to an understanding on subjects of common interest. This being disposed of the President spoke of the Veto and its effects—expressed his surprise that our friends should be so much dissatisfied with it—

averred he believed it would be the salvation of the party if the Whigs in Congress would take it in a becoming spirit—spoke of the delay in taking the question upon it in the Senate and expressed anxiety as to the tone and temper which the debate would assume there.

Badger—Mr. President, I am happy to find on inquiry that the best temper in the world prevails generally in the two Houses on this subject. I believe they are perfectly ready to take up Mr. Ewing's bill and pass it without alteration except in some unimportant particulars.

President—Talk not to me of Mr. Ewing's Bill—it contains that odious feature of local discounts which I have repudiated in my message.

Ewing—I have no doubt, sir, that the House, having ascertained your views, will pass a bill in conformity to them provided they can be satisfied that it will answer the purposes of the Treasury and relieve the country.

President—Cannot my Cabinet see that this is brought about. You must stand by me in this emergency. Cannot you see that such a bill passes Congress as I can sign without inconsistency?

Ewing—I think a bill which will meet your views may be introduced into the House of Rep. and pass that body. Of the Senate I am not so certain. If such a bill could pass both bodies speedily and receive your sanction, it would immediately restore harmony here and confidence throughout the nation.

President—I care nothing about the *Senate*—let the Bill pass the House with the understanding that it meets my approbation and the Senate may reject it on their own responsibility if they think best. But what do you understand to be my opinions? State them, so that there may be no misunderstanding.

Ewing—I understand you are of opinion that Congress may charter a Bank in the District of Columbia giving it its location here.

President—A nod of assent.

Ewing—That they may authorize such Bank to establish offices of Discount and Deposit in any of the States with the assent of the States in which they are so established.

President (sharply)—Don't name Discounts to me—they have been the source of the most abominable corruptions—and they are wholly unnecessary to enable the Bank to discharge its duties to the country and the Government.

Ewing—I am proposing nothing, but simply endeavoring to recapitulate what I have heretofore understood to be your opinions as to the powers which Congress may constitutionally confer on a Bank. I now understand your opinion to be, that they may not confer the power of local discount even with the assent of the States.

President—(An expression of assent).

Ewing—And I understand you to be of opinion that Congress may authorize such Bank to establish agencies in the several states with power to receive, disburse or transmit the public monies and to deal in Bills of Exchange without the assent of the States.

The President—Yes if they be foreign bills or bills drawn in one State and payable in another. That is all the power that is necessary for transmitting the public funds and regulating exchanges and the currency.

Webster—I would like such a bill, with power to deal in Exchanges alone, without authority derived from the States, much better than if it

combined the power of Discount with the assent of the States, and the power to deal in exchanges without such assent. I do not think it necessary to give such Bank the power of local discount, in order to enable [it] to perform all its duties to the country and to the government, unless indeed it be essential to the existence of such institution and then it is liable to the objection of attaching one implied power to another which once admitted might be carried to a dangerous extent. And there is an incongruity in performing any of the necessary functions of the general Government by the separate assent of individual States. If that which the U. S. wishes to do be necessary in the discharge of its constitutional duties, it has already the assent of all the States granted in and by the Constitution; if not necessary—there is no right to do it with such assent. That these particular powers are necessary seems to me very clear, for the purpose of safe keeping and transmitting the public monies, for the restoration of a sound currency, regulation of exchanges and especially of commerce between the States—and I believe it will furnish sufficient inducements to capitalists to take the stock.

The President expressed his acquiescence in the views of Mr. Webster—desired that we would see that the Bill should assume that form, and especially urged us to take care that it was placed in the hands of some one in the House who was his friend. Ewing enquired of him whether Mr. Sergeant would be agreeable to him. He replied in the affirmative—wished us in communicating on the subject not to commit him personally, as having agreed to this project; for he was apprehensive it would be made the subject of comparison to his prejudice—but advised us to say that from the Veto Message and from all that we knew of his opinions we inferred that this would be acceptable. He then spoke of the name, which he wished should be so changed that it would not be called a Bank. To this there were some objections, but his wishes were finally acquiesced in. He and Mr. Webster then conversed about the particular wording of the 16th fundamental article and agreed as to the form of expression which should introduce the grant of power.

He then requested Messrs. Webster and Ewing to attend to getting it before the House and directed them to prepare for him as soon as practicable an exposition in writing of their opinions upon it. Mr. Bell said to Webster and Ewing—"Gentlemen you have no time to lose—if you do not attend to this today another bill less acceptable may be got up and reported." We were about retiring when the President called Mr. Webster back. He remained a few minutes and then joined us. Messrs. Webster and Ewing then consulted as to the means of carrying out the wishes of the President and it was agreed that Mr. Webster should see Messrs. Berrien and Sergeant who represented the two Houses in this matter and possess them of the plan agreed on; and if they desired it Mr. Ewing would call on them afterwards.

In a short time afterwards I received a note from Mr. Webster stating that Messrs. Berrien and Sergeant wished to see me at Mr. Berrien's chamber at 5 o'clock, at which time I waited upon them. They stated to me that they had conversed with the President that morning and had gathered from his conversation, though he declined to speak in explicit terms, that he was disposed to favor a charter which authorized the dealing in Exchanges through agents in the several States without reference to the assent of the States, but that he had re-

ferred them to his Cabinet after he should have consulted them. They also informed me that Mr. Webster had suggested the particular frame and referred them to me for my concurrence. After full conversation they agreed to present the project, before our political friends, and if agreed to by them in both branches it was to be introduced into the House. It is proper here to note that the President expressed great sensitiveness lest he should be *committed* by anything that he or we should say to a project which would not be accepted by Congress and which would be contrasted with that which he had rejected. And once in the course of the conversation he said he was bewildered—he had no time to collect his thoughts; why could not this thing be postponed to the next session?

The Bill proposed could not be brought into the House until that in the Senate with the President's objections was disposed of. This was done on the 19th and Mr. Clay in the discussion made one of his most powerful and happy efforts—extorting expressions of rapturous applause from his most bitter enemies in that body, and thrilling his friends with delight. I was not present and consequently lost this noble intellectual treat, for it is wholly vain for Mr. Clay or any one else to attempt to transfer to paper any just presentment of his lofty and impassioned eloquence. But the President though treated with respect was sorely wounded, particularly by the popular impression which was anything but favorable to him. There was, it is said, in Mr. Clay's manner, an evident restraint and suppression of strong feeling while he spoke directly of the President, his position, his duty to the country, to those who placed him in power, and of his wide and unaccountable departure from all those duties² and his forgetfulness of all those obligations—but when Mr. Rives³ came out in the defence of the President and brought *himself* within the lion's bound, he sprang upon him with unrestrained and unmitigated impetuosity and poured forth upon him the whole torrent of his feelings in the most high toned and powerful invective. I had a report of the speech from Mr. Badger, himself an orator, who dwelt upon it with enthusiastic admiration.

I was taken ill on the night of the 19th and did not get about until Saturday, the 21st.

⁴ Monday, the 23^d, I called upon the President to transact some business and after conversing with him a few minutes Mr. Granger entered. The President soon introduced the subject of the Bank and his Veto and spoke with much feeling of the violence with which he was attacked and denounced by the Whigs and declared that he looked upon many of them as his very worst enemies. I told him it was what I had all along feared, if no means could be devised by which the Veto could be avoided—that in truth the excitement was not so general or the expression of disapprobation as strong as I had apprehended and endeavored to show him would take place. Mr. Granger said there was much to be considered on both sides, for, said he, "Sir, in every town and village, at the places where you and Genl. Harrison were insulted and denounced last fall, while the Whigs were supporting and defending you—flags are now hung out by your then enemies with Tyler and

² Word obscure, but seems to be "duties".

³ Senator William C. Rives of Virginia.

⁴ In the original this paragraph follows the fourth paragraph below. But a clean copy exists, made at some time for Mr. Ewing, in which the order is as herein given.

the Veto inserted on them in large characters—they have their triumphal processions, burn tar barrels, fire cannon and rejoice while the friends who elevated you either retire in silent sorrow or break out in expressions of disappointment or anger.” To this the President replied little and we soon parted.

On Saturday the 21st the President, the Secretary of War and myself went to the Arsenal to see some experiments with improved rockets. In the course of conversation there he threw out very strong intimations that he would probably veto the Bill which had lately been introduced if it should come to him.

Monday the 23d I sent him my argument upon the Bill as it then stood—having in the meantime received a printed copy of the Bill. Mr. Webster’s had been sent up a short time before. The 25th we had Cabinet Council—the President seemed gloomy and depressed—intimated in strong terms that he would not sign the bill and earnestly requested us to get it postponed—said in reply to an expression of doubt on our part that we had got it up easily, we might postpone it as easily if we chose to do it. He seemed earnest and exigent that this should be done.

On the 26th I conversed with him again in the presence of Granger. He still earnestly solicited postponement, not as he said because of the political but of the personal difficulties which immediate action upon it would involve.

A meeting of the members of the Cabinet was called at Mr. Webster’s on the evening of the 27th to take this matter into consideration. When after much consultation and a full interchange of opinions it was agreed to endeavor to postpone, if we found it could be done by the general assent of the Whigs of the two Houses of Congress.

Sept. 1. A short time before the Cabinet meeting today I called on Mr. Webster and found him in conversation with Mr. Rives, who suggested that Mr. Clay had given notice in the evening that the Bank Bill would be taken up this morning, and finally disposed of today. To this he had asked the consent of the opposition, who readily agreed to it. Mr. Rives having left us I asked Mr. Webster if he had seen Mr. Evans⁵ to induce him to hold a conversation with Mr. Berrien and if possible get him to postpone the bill until after the passage of the revenue bill as I had requested him last evening. He said he had not. I returned to my office and sent my son to Mr. Evans, and then went to the President’s to Council.

I met Mr. Badger at the door and we went in together. Bell and Granger were both there—the conversation first turned upon some indifferent matters—pertaining to the War Department. The President then examined and sent to the Senate some nominations from the State Department and told me that he had sent up all mine except the Baltimore Appraisers—that they objected to his friend Lester and he was unwilling to give him up. I told him I thought he would not make a good officer but that the names I had sent him were chosen with great care and I thought them unexceptionable. Just before I left him this subject was again adverted to and he said he must do something for Lester—he had but few friends and he must take care of them.⁶

⁵ Senator George Evans of Maine.

⁶ John Lester was nominated by Tyler as appraiser of merchandise for the port of Baltimore, December 14, 1841. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate, March 29, 1842.

Messrs. Webster and Crittenden came in. A report on the Fortifications was produced and read by Mr. Bell. It was in reply to a resolution of the Senate passed in March last calling for information at the commencement of the (then) next session. It was generally understood that the next session meant the next regular session and Mr. Badger said that on consultation it had been so agreed in Cabinet. I was not present at such agreement or do not remember it, but think the construction right unless the contrary appear in the resolution. The report of Mr. Bell was objected to by all the other members of the Cabinet, because it recognized a probable necessity of hereafter extending our fortifications very greatly—it was thought that he ought to have confined himself to the *present* wants of the country—namely, fortifications of the first class which can be completed at an expense of nine millions.

The Committee of the Senate called and presented several enrolled bills for the President's signature—he signed all except the bill for the distribution of the proceeds of the public Lands—this he read to us—made comments on some parts of it—talked jocosely about a *Veto*—asked our opinion of the clause objected to, which was that which gives 500,000 acres each to the new States for the purpose of internal improvements. I placed that clause upon this ground. The U. S. is exempt from taxation by the States while a great proprietor of lands within the State—all other land holders are taxed for their improvements which greatly enhance the value of the land. The U. S. as a proprietor ought to contribute to that by which it so much profits and this is the mode in which alone it can be done. Having conversed some time on the subject he asked the Atty. General for an opinion on the point.

A few minutes were spent on the mode of paying our Ministers abroad and a question raised as to the value of the pound sterling, on which I agreed to report.

Todd, the new Minister to Russia,⁷ called and much was said to him in our presence of the importance of the mission, the precarious state of our relations with England and the necessity of having the aid of Russia in any contest with that power. His (the President's) manner during the session was courteous and kind—not perfectly frank though evidently striving to appear so. I thought the objections to the Land Bill a mere show of reason for keeping it awhile in hand that he might approve it or not as *political expediency* should dictate.

On returning to the Department my son reported that he saw Mr. Evans who had used every effort to postpone the bill, but without success. That Mr. Clay insisted on taking it up—said he was not ready to go on with the Revenue Bill—and that it was understood that the revenue bill should be laid on the table and the Bank bill taken up and disposed of, and he called upon the *opposition* to say if this were not the case—they vouched that it was—a vote was taken—all the Locos but one voted for taking up—13 Whigs against it, and it was taken up and considered—many of the Whigs were much incensed at Mr. Clay's course.

The events of the day caused me much reflection. On the one hand Mr. Clay was evidently hurrying matters to a catastrophe, intending to hasten the new Bank bill upon Mr. Tyler; force him to approve or

⁷ Colonel Charles S. Todd of Kentucky, under whom Motley served as secretary of legation.

Veto—in the latter event compel the Cabinet to resign—drive Tyler into the Democratic party⁸—denounce the Administration and make himself as the head of the Whig party an opposition candidate for the Presidency. This opinion was formed from a consideration of previous matters connected with the doings of the day. Should these things take place and should I resign and unite in such a movement, I would be subjected to the imputation of having been a false counsellor to the President—near his person—admitted to his secret councils, and at the same time conniving with and abetting his most bitter adversary in his attempt to overthrow him, and when the movement came in which he was involved inextricably with having abandoned him to his fate and openly joined the enemy.

On the other hand if I should remain in the Cabinet after another Veto through the scene of excitement and in the midst of the denunciation consequent upon it, I would be charged with having abandoned my well known principles and broken up old associations for the love of office. It also seemed certain that some members of the Cabinet would resign. Those who should remain, must be associated with persons whom we did not esteem and whose political principles were adverse to ours. The situation of such of us would be the most unpleasant that could be conceived. We would be made the constant object of attack by the papers on both sides in politics, and probably be at last compelled to resign or be displaced, with injured characters, and minds soured and discontented. What was to be done?

I conversed very freely with Mr. Bell on the evening of this day and compared opinions and impressions with him. He concurred with me entirely as to the difficulty of our situation but declared that he would not resign for a Veto on the Bank Bill—nor in the event of resignation for other cause or removal, would he unite in or consent to the nomination of Mr. Clay, at this time. On the supposition of a Veto on the Land Bill his opinion as well as mine was in favor of Resignation—not because we differed from the President in two important measures but because in both he had been false to us—and because we believed the Veto upon those two bills made the evidence complete, that he betrayed the party by which we were all brought into power and sold himself to the adversary.

In the evening late Granger called on me. We compared notes and concurred in opinion. He said Mr. Clay had lost many friends by the hot haste with which he pressed the Bank Bill forward—spoke of the great imprudence of putting the Bank bill before the revenue bill, if he really desired that the Land Bill should be approved.

⁹On the whole I became satisfied that Mr. Clay was impatient, and unhappy in his then present position. He had been the undisputed leader of the Whig party for many years while they were in a minority and he could not well endure now they were in power, that his supremacy should be questioned or the power over the party divided. He wished submission from the Cabinet—this so far as I and some others were concerned was impossible. I would not even consult with him, after a breach between him and the President took place until after I presented my letter of resignation.

⁸ This phrase, “drive Tyler into the Democratic party”, is written in Mr. Ewing's hand of a much later date than the rest of the diary.

⁹ This paragraph is in Mr. Ewing's handwriting of much later date than the rest.

Sept. 2d. Nothing special occurred. The President, the Cabinet and the chairmen of the committee of Foreign Relations of the Senate and House dined with Mr. Webster. In the course of the evening the President said to me that he had Mr. Selden's¹⁰ views as to the choice of depositories of the public money which he wished to submit to me. That he was very anxious to hold the Treasurer responsible on his bond. He said he understood I had selected the Bank of Commerce in New York, which I told him was the case. He said he wanted to suggest some stipulations and I said I would send him the contract. In the evening we had a large party at Mr. Bell's where the President attended.

I had in the course of the day a long conversation with George Summers,¹¹ who said the universal opinion was that the Cabinet should hold their places until actually removed by the President. That the country considered us as holding by a higher tenure than merely his appointment, and that a resignation would be considered as an abandonment of the post which Genl. Harrison and the Nation had assigned us, and if the President chose to add this last crowning sin to his already great transgression that it should be his act not ours, *he* should be held responsible for it.

I also conversed during the day with Goode and Stokely members from Ohio and with Alfred Kelly all of whom united strongly in the same opinion.¹² I put the case to them of a Veto on the Bank bill in progress in the house—it was, they said, on the supposition of that Veto they had urged their opinion. I then put the case of a Veto on the Land Bill which would show a clear and fixed purpose to abandon the Whigs and their principles and throw himself into the arms of the opposition. On that they hesitated but inclined to the opinion that we should still hold our places and let *him* do the last crowning act of dismissal which they said would be esteemed by the people a sacrilegious desecration of the memory of the beloved Harrison.

The speech of Mr. Clay in the Senate, this day as reported by Mr. Fletcher Webster¹³ was in his happiest manner, and was much spoken of (see the papers).

It was told me in the evening that Mr. Rives had called in the course of the day upon the President and proposed an amendment to the Bank Bill, providing that if any state should expressly dissent, that the corporation thereafter should not be suffered to deal in Exchange within its limits except so far as the wants of the Treasury required—which amendment he, Mr. Rives, was willing to support and that being inserted to vote for the Bill. The President declined having anything to do with the modification and preferred that the Bill should be sent to him in its then present form.

My letter to Luther Barker¹⁴ published in the Madisonian this morning was read and commented upon by Mr. Buchannan in the Senate.

¹⁰ William Selden, treasurer of the United States.

¹¹ George W. Summers, representative from Virginia.

¹² Patrick G. Goode and Samuel Stokely were representatives from Ohio, Alfred Kelly a man prominent in the management of the state's finances and father of the Ohio Canal.

¹³ Son of the Secretary of State, and at this time his private secretary.

¹⁴ Luther D. Barker had been a fellow-student of Mr. Ewing's at Ohio University.

It was spoken of at dinner by Mr. Webster in terms of commendation. The publication of that letter did not, in the opinion of our friends at all strengthen the position of the President.

Extract from "Madisonian"—Sept. 2d, 1841.

"The position taken by the President, that the people did not decide in the election of 1840 in favor of any particular scheme of finance, most of our readers will admit has been fully sustained.

"We have received, however, a communication signed by five of our subscribers at Piketown, Ohio, taking a very different view. They state that the issue was presented in Ohio, and decided in favor of a Bank by an immense majority. They are of course hostile to the Veto, and think that nothing will be sound or settled without a Bank. We hope they will be content with this simple notice to their communication. Although they have on their side the aid of the Senator of Kentucky, yet they and he must admit that there is at least room for an honest difference of opinion on the subject. We happen to have before us directly in point, the testimony of a well known, and influential witness from their own State, whose opinion we know they will respect, denouncing the attempt during the election to make the question of a bank the issue between the parties, to be impudent and absurd. We refer to the following letter from the present distinguished head of the Treasury Department."

LANCASTER, July 1840

My Dear Sir:

On my return from Columbus this evening I received your letter informing me that, in a speech at Philadelphia, I had said the true question between the parties was a Bank of the United States, and that you from a knowledge of *me* had contradicted the assertion. In this you were of course perfectly safe. I made no such statement but the very contrary. I avowed that the true question was and is the restriction of Executive power. That its encroachments, open and covert, were of the most alarming nature, and if not resisted must end in the subversion of all that is valued in the Republican principles of our Government, and that a gorgon's monarchy in effect if not in name must rise on its ruins. I said that our opponents were attempting to make the question of *Bank* the issue between the parties. I spoke of the *impudence* and *absurdity* of the attempt. That a Bank was not and never had been considered by us as anything more than a matter of convenience a useful article of furniture of our *noble edifice*. That our opponents were gravely raising and debating the question whether this article of furniture was convenient or necessary, Whether we should have a *table* or a *settee* standing in our halls, while its sappers and miners were at work tumbling its walls and columns about our ears. This with amplification and illustrations, is the substance of what I said touching that particular object.

You perceive therefore that you did not mistake my opinion or my language. . . .

Your sincere Friend
T. EWING

L. D. Barker, Esq.

Sept. 3d. Today I sent the President a copy of my letter of contract with the Banks accompanying it with a note in which I said I would be happy to receive and consider any suggestions which he might choose to offer. I did not call to see him, but understood from Mr. Bell that he was disposed to talk on business merely, but was jocose and cheerful. Several of my friends called today to offer me their counsel, which was uniformly the same as that noted yesterday.

I called to see Mr. Webster and had a long conversation with him. He expressed great anxiety about the condition of things and seemed to anticipate a dissolution of the Cabinet. He said he could not sleep well of nights, for thinking of it—said if he were rich he would not mind it personally, but that he felt great unwillingness at his age to return to the Bar. We agreed that the situation at the head of a department here was enviable, if the President had intellect and was in harmony with his Cabinet and all supported by a good majority in the two houses. Spoke of a resignation in a certain event but desired to ascertain whether the President had been bargaining with the adversary.

Sept. 4th. Called on the President this morning and found Messrs. Bell and Granger with him. Mr. Webster came in soon after.

The conversation turned on the Land Bill which was lying on the table, before the President. He declared that it was his wish to approve it, but he objected to one clause as containing a recognition of the right of Congress to appropriate *land* and therefore *money* to internal improvements which right he denied. He drew up a declaration of his opinion on that subject, which on consultation underwent some modifications—he said he would have it copied in a fair hand and place one copy in the hands of each member of his Cabinet. He asked our opinion as to the *time* of sending up the Land Bill. The Bank Bill was passed and would probably be Vetoed; should he retain the Land Bill and send up both together or send the Land Bill immediately? The latter course was advised and resolved upon, as the more frank and generous—he having known of the passage of the Bank Bill before he approved the other.

The committee on Enrolled Bills came in and brought the Bank Bill to the President and withdrew. He wished to converse with us on the subject in the most perfect confidence—he should probably be compelled to Veto the Bill and he thought of accompanying the Veto with a solemn declaration that he would not be a candidate for the Presidency another term—said he had no ambition except to preserve a pure unsullied reputation, protect the constitution and promote the interests of the country and he thought such declaration would place his motives fairly before the people and disarm those who were assailing him. The members of the Cabinet present did not concur in these views and they were very readily surrendered by the President. He was generally it is true tenacious of his opinions but on this point he showed great deference to the views of his Constitutional advisers. In the course of the conversation he said that he had indited a sentence intended for insertion in his inaugural, expressly declaring that he would not be a candidate for reelection; which he withheld lest its effect should be to turn the batteries of Mr. Clay and his friends on Mr. Webster.

He evidently felt anxious and unhappy. He observed that coming to the Presidency as he did, without being prominent in the canvass, he

rallied no friends around him and had no party. That a singular spectacle was now presented—heretofore if a member of the Administration party abandoned the President he was instantly assailed and certainly prostrated, but now whoever ventured to support the President was as certainly ruined. He talked of his meditated Veto message—said he should criticise the bill with much severity. Mr. Webster thought it imprudent and not entirely consistent with official dignity to do so—that such a paper ought to be calm, elevated and full of dignity. The hope was expressed by some of us that he might yet approve the bill and we parted.

I walked to the Department with Mr. Webster who said we must prepare the public through the press for the event and wished me to call and see him in the morning.

Sept. 5". After reflecting very fully on what occurred at the President's yesterday, I made up my mind that we ought not yet to give up the question or attempt to bring the public mind to an acquiescence in it. I called on Mr. Webster and gave him my views fully which were—

That the President had given him a fine opening for a free and confidential conversation at which he might tell him in the fulness of gratitude and in the sincerity of friendship the whole truth as to his present position—to show him the certain ruin of private reputation and political power consequent upon the contemplated Veto and perhaps induce him to avoid the gulf into which he was about to plunge. Well knowing the motives likely to operate on the mind of the President I suggested to Mr. Webster this course of conversation—

1st. To express his grateful feelings to the President for the friendly consideration of himself (Mr. W.) which had governed his (the President's) action in framing his inaugural.

2d. To speak of his own relations with Mr. Clay, and how and why there was not and could not be cordial amity between them.

3d. To speak of the other members of the Cabinet. Their willingness to support the President against any and all assailants if he would but give them ground to stand upon. That for myself, I was well impressed with the fact that Mr. Clay exacted great sacrifices of his friends and was willing to sacrifice nothing to them. That I was the friend of Mr. Clay as he (the President) had been his friend, but that I would not fail to sustain the Administration to which I belonged against any attack which Mr. Clay might think fit to make upon it. That I would be very far from sacrificing *my own certain present*, to *his contingent future*. That as to Mr. Bell, he was less strongly bound to Mr. Clay than was supposed; that he felt that he had sacrificed enough to Mr. Clay's ambition and that he would be willing to go in cordially with the President if this means were furnished of sustaining himself.

Messrs. Badger and Granger not being friends of Mr. Clay could be the subjects of no jealousy and the presence of Mr. Crittenden as a member of the Cabinet would serve to avert attacks, in the mischief of which, if made he must share.

4th. That he should refer to the suggestions of The President yesterday—that the Cabinet had no power or they could have postponed this bill, and say that circumstances had placed it out of their power to exert their influence in this but that their true strength was tested in getting up and carrying through the House the Bill, which was framed by their suggestion to meet the then expressed views of the President. That

he ought not to forget the circumstances under which that bill was got up and the situation in which we were placed with regard to it. That it did not at first meet the views of the members of either house—the country had not spoken upon it and the House was not willing to pass it until they had the assurance of the Senate that it would pass through that body. On full consultation this assurance was obtained and by our intercession and through our influence—hence after the passage of the bill in the House a few members of the Senate could not consistently with good faith, unite with the Locos and defeat the Bill nor could we in good faith ask them to do it; and it was not strange that the two houses should be unwilling, after passing the Bill through one Branch and finding it not only acceptable, but earnestly desired by the country, to abandon it without being able to render a reason to their constituents for such act. Hence it was not a case to test the influence of his Cabinet.

5th. That he should fully and carefully examine the situation of the President, as to the Bill. His committal in the Veto Message—in his inaugural—in his message to the two houses at the opening of the Session and his conversation to members of Congress, declaring his concurrence in such a bill.

6th. That he should undeceive him as to the supposed powerful effect of the public monies in regulating the currency.

In all this Mr. Webster concurred and wrote a note to the President saying that he would see him tomorrow morning.

The Whig papers from all the West and S. W. today were filled with the most bitter denunciations against the President on account of the first Veto. The signature of the Land Bill drew down upon him heavy animadversions from some of the Locos in the Senate yesterday (conversation between Wise and Beilly Peyton yesterday).¹⁵ And the rumor was rife that the President through Judge Upsher and Alex. Hamilton offered the situation of Attorney-General to McMahon of Baltimore who rejected it with disdain and indignation as a proposed act of treachery to the Whig party.

After our repeated conversations with the President and modifications to meet his views and remove his objections Mr. Webster and myself felt quite safe in assuring Mr. Berrien and Mr. Sergeant that the bill as we had modified it, if passed by the two Houses would receive his sanction. It was so passed without the change of a word, and when I ascertained that he had Vetoed it, I parted with a determination never to meet him again as a member of his Cabinet. Indeed I could not feel that my reputation as a man of truth and candor was safe, while I attempted to represent him. I went to my Department and advised him by letter that I would resign on the next Saturday at 12 o'clock. I wrote my letter of resignation—sent him a blank appointment for a suc-

¹⁵ Henry A. Wise, representative from Virginia, and Bailie Peyton of Tennessee, formerly representative from that state. The persons mentioned in the next sentence are Judge Abel P. Upshur of Virginia, afterward Secretary of State, the son of General Alexander Hamilton, and John V. L. McMahon, counsel of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and author of *An Historical View of Maryland* (1831). With this next sentence the diary ends. The rest of the manuscript is in Mr. Ewing's handwriting of much later date.

cessor ad interim—caused my letter of resignation to be recorded and dispatched my messenger with it to the President. Just as I was leaving the Department Mr. Webster's messenger came with a request that I would see him immediately. I called and found him at his table with my letter of resignation lying before him—he took it up as if weighing in his hand and asked me if I recognized it—and added, “it is a harsh paper, the President has not read a word of it; he feels kindly towards you, has authorized me to tell you so, and that as you are determined to resign, if you part in friendship he will give your choice of Foreign Missions—think better of it and withdraw this letter.” I told him it was impossible—that my people must know why I left the responsible position in which Genl. Harrison with their concurrence had placed me, that the reasons were set forth in that letter and I had made up my mind to abide by it. He told me he had determined to remain for the present—that there was one important fact stated which I could have got from no one but him—and as it might disturb his relations with the President he wished me to change the sentence and return the paper to him. I went again to the Treasury Department, made the change—had the record corrected and returned the letter.¹⁶

It was published in the *Intelligencer* Monday morning and caused much sensation.¹⁷ Mr. Webster suffered much by remaining in the Cabinet, with his new associates. It was a mistake from the effects of which he never recovered. My friends who advised me not to resign after the publication of my letter approved what I had done.

Below is a copy taken from the *Intelligencer*. The record in the Department seems to have been destroyed.

¹⁶ In Tyler's *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II. 122, note, is a story of the receipt of the letter of resignation by the President and of Webster's taking it. given in a letter of 1883 by John Tyler, jr., the president's son and private secretary.

¹⁷ Reprinted in *Niles' Register*, LXI. 33-34, and partly in Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, II. 343-345.